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RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 7945
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2448
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 1817
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 5837
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 5591
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2210
RUEUITH/DET 1 39LG ANKARA TU
RHMFIUU/USDOCO 6ATAF IZMIR TU
RHMFIUU/39OS INCIRLIK AB TU
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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EUR/SE, EUR/PD, NEA/PD, DRL
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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

TUESDAY, APRIL 3, 2007

In Today's Papers

High Court Scraps Effort to Isolate Alcohol-Serving Restaurants
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet and others report the Turkish Council of State (Danistay) has annulled a directive issued by the Interior Ministry with an aim to relocate restaurants serving alcohol to "red zones" in suburbs. Prime Minister Erdogan had defended the effort saying "protection of young people from bad habits" was "stipulated by the constitution" whereas mainstream media criticized the attempt, calling it an attempt to create "red light districts." A debate was kicked off in Turkey in July 2005 when the ruling AKP government changed the law on municipalities to allow local administrations to regulate locations of restaurants serving alcohol to certain zones to be determined by city councils.

Anavatan Loses Party Group Status in Parliament

All papers report that after the death yesterday in a traffic accident of Omer Abusoglu, a Gaziantep province lawmaker from the opposition Motherland Party (Anavatan), the number of Anavatan MPs in the Parliament dropped to 19, breaking up their party group. The current distribution of seats in Turkish Parliament is, AKP 354, CHP 153, ANAVATAN 19, DYP 4, SHP 1, HYP 1, GP 1, Independent 10, and Vacant 7. In order to form a party group, Turkish law requires that a party hold at least 20 seats in Parliament.

Kurdish Mayor Arrested for Praising Ocalan

All papers report Aydin Budak, Kurdish party DTP mayor of Cizre township in the southeastern Turkish province of Sirnak, has been arrested for saluting Abdullah Ocalan in a speech during Nevruz celebrations by saying, "Happy Nevruz, Imrali." Imrali is the prison-island where the PKK leader is imprisoned. Budak's lawyers said they would appeal the verdict while a group of DTP supporters and Cizre Municipality employees protested the arrest.

YOK to Discuss New Universities, Erdogan Presidential Candidacy
Milliyet, Sabah and Cumhuriyet report the Turkish High Education

Council (YOK) is to convene university rectors in an extraordinary meeting April 5 to discuss the ruling AKP government decision to open 17 new universities and the election of Turkey's new president.

Papers expect YOK to respond to Prime Minister Erdogan and Education Minister Huseyin Celik's criticisms with regard to the new universities as well as evaluate Erdogan's possible candidacy for president.

Turkey to Take over ISAF Command Again

All papers report Turkey will assume its second term leadership of the Kabul Regional Command in Afghanistan. Brigadier General Kasim Erdem will assume the second term Kabul Regional Command. With the handover of the command on April 6, the number of Turkish troops deployed in the region will be increased to 1,150 from 750.

Editorial Commentary on Iran, Kirkuk

Haluk Ulman comments in the economic-political daily Dunya: "Iran continues to defy the US and the UK in the latest crisis over captured British sailors. Where does Iran get this courage from? There are many rumors but the most important reason is the belief that the US, in trouble in Iraq, will not be able to attack Iran. Of course, Iran will be harmed in many ways in case of an armed conflict with the US. Iran's badly administrated economy will worsen and its infrastructure will be damaged beyond repair. The example of two clashing pitchers should always be remembered: if one pitcher is broken, the other one will get cracked. So Iran should change its attitude soon. If the aim is to protect the peace, then, just like people, countries also should learn to control their desires."

Sami Kohen observes in the mainstream daily Milliyet: "The Kurds' target in Kirkuk is very obvious; they are trying to change the demographic structure of the city to their advantage and claim

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Kirkuk as the capital of the Iraqi Federation of Kurdistan. Kirkuk has been moving in this direction for a while. Since the end of the Saddam regime, around 650,000 Kurds migrated to Kirkuk. Meanwhile, because of pressure and threats, around 90,000 Arabs have left Kirkuk. The Kurds, on their arrival in Kirkuk, quickly settle down and illegally take possession of property. The Kurdish majority will increase in Kirkuk after more Arabs leave the place using the government's incentives. This causes a serious concern among the Turkmen population. Turkmen businessmen have already started leaving Kirkuk for good and migrating to Turkey or to some Arab countries. Turkmen officials in Kirkuk say that the phase of threats and pressure will be followed by the phase of terror. Many Turkmen lost their lives in the latest bombings and the rest are living in fear. Is this the way to return Kirkuk to normal?"

TV Highlights

NTV, 7.00 A.M.

Domestic News

- Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul is to travel to Germany Tuesday on a two-day official visit to meet with his counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier and launch a project on providing consular services on the internet.

- CHP MP Kemal Anadol accused Prime Minister Erdogan of trying to manipulate the nation with regard to the presidential elections.

- Turkey's economic growth exceeds government and market expectations of 5 percent, reaching 6 percent in 2006, said Deputy Prime Minister Abdullatif Sener, adding national income has grown about 7.3 percent in the last four years.

- Three "purse snatchers" have been sentenced to life in prison for killing a woman while trying to steal her bag in Istanbul.

International News

- US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi met with Lebanese officials in Beirut in a fact-finding trip to the Middle East that has drawn criticism from the White House because it includes a visit to Syria.

- Iraqi prosecutors seek the death penalty for Saddam Hussein's cousin "Chemical Ali" for his use of poison gas against the regime's opponents including the Kurds.

- Iraq's most senior Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, has opposed a new draft that would allow thousands of former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath party to return to public life.

- An explosives-laden truck blew up outside a police station in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk on Monday, killing 13 people including 9 children.

- The Independent columnist Robert Fisk describes the strains between Iran and Britain as a "war of humiliation."
WILSON